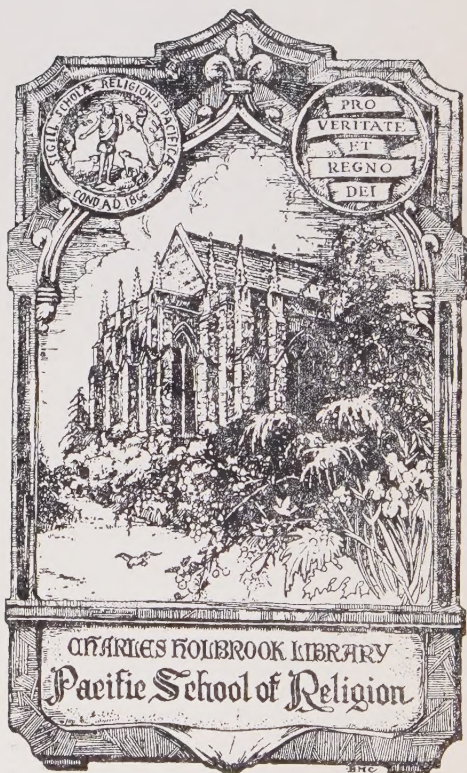


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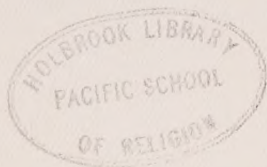
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No. 693

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SIFTINGS

Excerpts from Sermons Preached in
Plymouth Congregational Church,
San Francisco, California, by

REV. F. B. CHERINGTON, D. D.



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816 BATTERY ST., SAN FRANCISCO



Cordially Yours
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*To the Y. P. S. C. E. of Plymouth Church,
by whose kindness and enterprise their publi-
cation has been made possible ;*

*To " The Dearest Endeavorer " of them all,
whose encouragement and unfaltering faith
have been the chief incentives to the work of
preparing them, I dedicate SIFTINGS.*

F. B. C.

SIFTINGS

Genesis 18:25

THERE is a popular demand for a large admixture of India rubber in the moral code. But God put none in. He made the granite of the eternal hills and the moral code alike with unbending qualities.

God is no respecter of persons, but He is a respecter of circumstances. He can and does measure with absolute precision the efforts made by each soul in its own surroundings, and with its own light, to do its honest, earnest best. Because of this He as Judge of all the earth can and will do right. Neither Jephthah nor Eli was the model chosen by Jesus to typify the Heavenly Father. He is neither too stern, nor unwisely lenient.

We look at a straight-edge lying under rippling water and it appears bent and crooked. Yet as a matter of fact it is as straight there as when we see it in the air. Conscience is an eternal moral straight-edge, so far as loyalty to what the individual feels

ought to be obeyed, is concerned. We look at conscience in its workings in the lives of those whose environments, training and enlightenment differ from ours, and we think it is anything but straight. Yet it is in reality for those souls as surely a true straight-edge as ours is for us, and the "Judge of all the earth" knows it, and will mete out judgment accordingly.



Isaiah 60:1

HERE we find one of God's ways of giving repentant failures a new chance. It is in dealing with flagrant and chronic offenders that we find the widest contrast between the human and the divine character. A man who has to deal with one who has transgressed and repented, been forgiven only to repeat the whole experience over and over again, is very likely to think he has done all that could be required, when after the seventh time he opens a narrow door before the offender, and says with reproach and distrust in every tone, "There, I will give you another chance, see what you make of it."

Not so God's way. He does for every repentant failure just what he did for Israel here by the mouth of the Prophet. He

throws open an opportunity that is like a wide-stretching landscape, flooded with sunshine, and teeming with everything that can waken hope and kindle gladness, and then without a suggestion of distrust or reproach says: "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." This is an Old Testament putting of the same idea that Jesus illustrated by the parable of the Prodigal Son. To recreant but penitent Israel, and to recreant but penitent individual failures alike, God has ever been eager to give a new chance, wide and radiant as the opening gates of day.



John 15:9, 10

SAILING along one of the channels near Sitka, Alaska, and talking with the Captain about the exceedingly dark color of the water, indicating great depth, I asked: "How deep is this channel?" He replied: "I do not know. Nobody knows. I only know that we do not carry rope enough to sound its depths." So when I read such passages as this: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you," I doubt whether

any mind has yet grasped the fullness of its meaning. The world does not carry rope enough to measure the depths of divine love for men.

No star-dotted sky at midnight is brighter with gleaming points of light, than is the sky that bends above every child of man, with tokens of God's love and mercy, flashing out through the darkness the promises and assurances of divine solicitude and help and guidance. More lifting of the eyes to see what really is in plain sight above us, would save us many an hour of despondency, despair and doubt. The Scriptures put great language to severest strains to teach men the fullness, richness, minuteness and ceaselessness of God's love and care for His children.



Acts 4 : 13

WHEN Moses with shining face came down from the mountain, men knew that the radiance was the lingering glory of the manifested presence of God he had enjoyed.

The most mysterious but gladdest fact in human life is, that common men and women may come into such close and vivid relations with the divine, that a glory shall encircle their lives just as truly as in Moses' experience. These two men of whom the Sanhedrin "took knowledge that they had been with Jesus," were only common, unlearned and ignorant fishermen, made of very common clay, fashioned in very common environments, accustomed to only the commonest sort of experiences of the most ordinary life. Yet the spiritually absorbing qualities of their common natures, had taken up so much of Jesus' spirit, influence, and power, that even the jaundiced eyes of the fiercely malignant Sanhedrin could see it. Herein is hope for us all. There is no measuring the receptive powers of the spiritual nature of the most ordinary soul. The commonest fabric that lies in the attar of roses will give out its fragrance wherever it goes.



John 15:4

TAKE up a plant bodily, roots and all, from its place in the earth, carry it about with you no matter how carefully, it will soon begin to wilt and die. But put it

again into the soil, water it, and let its roots again establish their natural relations with the earth, and once more it lifts its drooping head, expands its leaves, and visibly rejoices in its restored health and life.

Not more surely was the plant created to abide in the soil and find its nourishment there, than were our spiritual natures framed for finding their abiding place in Christ, and drawing from Him their strength and joy and life. "To abide in Christ," is simply to get into normal relations with divine things, and to stay there.

There is something very beautiful in the intense love of home that characterizes the carrier pigeon. Nansen took a cage of these birds with him on his wonderful voyage toward the North Pole. Even from the far north, over vast stretches of ice and snow, the sturdy little home-lovers winged their way, bearing their brief messages to their homes, when released from their prisons.

So when the bonds of sinful powers that hold the soul captive have been broken, straight and certain is its flight back to the home for which it was made, and where alone, like Noah's dove, it can find rest and peace and abiding joy. Every straying soul

in its better moments, when it comes to itself, always feels a great home-sick yearning for "the Father's house" and the Father's love.



John 14 : 23

GENERAL GRANT, in speaking of General Sheridan's qualities as a soldier, said : " He was always where his commander expected him to be, did what he was expected to do, at the time and in the way he was expected to do it." He was to be counted on as a reliable factor by his commander in the solution of any problem in which he figured.

When this spirit characterizes a soldier of Christ, there will be no stopping to haggle over questions of duty, questions of expediency, or questions of privilege. There will be no time or anxiety wasted over framing excuses for failure, or finding subterfuges for shirking, or explaining dalliance. The whole life will be adjusted to prompt, faithful, joyous obedience. On receiving a command of duty, the very first act will be to flash the order along the entire line of our being : " This train alone has right of way, everything else side-tracked."

The drill of an army preparing for an active campaign must be incessant, in order that when the tremendous issues of battle hang in jeopardy, the habits of discipline may almost by automatic action and skill turn the scale. For a suddenly and severely tempted soul, there is no safeguard more reliable than the disciplined habit of obedience to the slightest whisper of duty. Joseph showed the thoroughness of his moral discipline, as well as revealed the secret of his loyalty, when, in the moment of his great temptation, he cried out : “ How can I sin against God and do this great wickedness.”



John 14:6

NOTHING has been more abundantly proved by human experience than that knowing the right does not insure doing it. What men need more than anything else is some strong, constant influence that will help the will to decide for the right and sustain the efforts made to do it. It was a heathen poet who out of his frequent failures wrote :

I see the right—approve it too ;
Abhor the wrong—and yet the wrong pursue.

It was Seneca who, amid the gilded corruptions of Nero's court, when fighting his hard battle for a clean life, cried out: "O that some one would reach out a helping hand!"

Just about the time Seneca was writing this pathetic appeal, to which no satisfying answer came, Paul not far away, was writing his 7th chapter of Romans, putting into the most vigorous language ever written on the subject, the picture of the struggle between the nobler and the baser self in every man: "What I would, that do I not, but what I hate that do I." He too cries out: "Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" The triumphant answer comes: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Here as everywhere else, Jesus is the "way, the truth and the life." His methods, His teachings, His spirit and His life supply the needed impulses, strength and light.



John 14:21

REASON may clearly point out the way to righteousness of character and conduct. Experience may demonstrate its wisdom. Forces of heredity and environment

may strongly urge one toward it. But there is no power save love, that can by a subtle alchemy all its own, go into the depths of the soul and fuse together all the warring elements struggling there, bring them into subjection to itself, and lead them out into harmonious, sustained and joyous action, until that highest of all ends in human life is achieved, righteousness of character and conduct.

Said the French soldier upon whose wounded breast the surgeon was operating : " Probe a little deeper and you will find the Emperor." Because Napoleon's image was in his inmost heart, the faithful soldier's service and life had been joyously rendered up to the object of his love. When " Christ is formed within us," then love to Him becomes the master passion of the life, and obedience to Him becomes the easy habit, service to Him the highest joy, likeness to Him the supreme aim, then the problem of attaining to righteousness of character and conduct is solved. Forever will it be true that as a man's love is, so will his life be. Love will dominate the life as the earth's electric current masters the magnetic needle, and holds it steadily to the pole.

BE in your spiritual nature like the sensitive plant that quietly but firmly closes whenever rudeness touches it, or darkness comes down upon it, but opens gently, gladly and confidently when the sunshine pours its genial warmth over it, and when the breath of morning whispers to it that the moment has come for it to expand and inhale the sweet influences that flood the air around it, and by one of Nature's beautiful laws exhales its own fragrance by that very act.

The more perfect one's manhood or womanhood, the more exquisitely delicate is the spiritual sensitiveness. Nothing responds more surely to cultivation than this, and nothing proclaims more sadly the want of the highest and noblest culture, than the absence or inferior grade of this.

As we study the life of Jesus, nothing impresses us more than the exquisiteness of his spiritual sensitiveness. And as we follow Peter, John and the other disciples through their spiritual development, nothing so astonishes us as the rapid and steady increase of spiritual sensitiveness. By the Thermo-electric pile, scientists can detect and register degrees of heat and cold once thought too

delicate to make any note of. This wonderfully delicate instrument is constructed out of material that originally was very common iron, and other coarse metals, but carefully prepared, and skillfully combined, they are converted into the marvelously sensitive instrument that amazes us by its delicately discerning power. So as we witness the transformation of these common types of ordinary manhood into the spiritually refined sensitive souls they became, we learn how great is the power that wrought in them, and will work in us, if we submit in the same loving obedience as that with which they yielded themselves to it.



Matthew 4:4

THERE is in man something the baker cannot feed. In the delicious quiet and coolness of the early morning hours, I was rowing on the placid bosom of a mountain lake. Around me spread the mirror-like waters. Back from the shore rose in dark, solemn majesty the giant fir trees. Beneath their sturdy branches grew the densely tangled undergrowth, and under that the

ferns, and under them the lovely fern-moss spread out its velvet carpet in exquisite freshness and beauty. Along the water's edge stood long hedge-rows of the largest, most richly colored and most fragrant wild roses I had ever seen. Letting my oars lie, I glided slowly and softly along, feeling that something more than dead matter spoke to my soul from out the depths of these myriad beauties. Then a lark, fresh from his dewy bath in the meadow, alighted upon a swaying rose branch, turned his face heavenward, quivering and throbbing with the intensity of his joyousness, and poured forth his thrilling morning hymn of praise that woke in the depths of my soul a responsive chord, and I joined him in singing like a ringing hallelujah : " Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

In that moment, with emotions awakened by the scenes around me, could any materialistic disenchanter have convinced me that I was nothing more than the cattle that stood listlessly gazing and stupidly grazing on the opposite shore? Could he have made me believe that there was not something in me that the baker cannot feed—something no material food can satisfy?

So, too, every thrill enjoyed by lovers of music, every moment of delight that lovers

of art have experienced, every intellectual feast, every spiritual joy, everything that has successfully appealed to the higher nature within men, has conclusively proved that there is in man something the baker cannot feed.

To supply that thing in him with bread, God's word has come into this world. To feed that, every spiritual force crowds upon him. To build up that in him until he comes to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," all holy influences are converged upon him, and play unceasingly upon him throughout his whole earthly career.



Matthew 4:3

JESUS had just wakened from his forty days' fasting. Fierce hunger was clamoring and a body weakened, would easily have supplied an excuse for a yielding will. Imagine if you can, the intensity of the struggle. Bear in mind, also, that it was a lawful appetite, not the guilty abnormal hunger of the opium eater, or the self-condemning thirst of the drunkard. Any one accustomed to examine his own mental processes

is aware of the almost irresistible influence of the appetite when fully aroused, over the will, and their power to set all the faculties of the mind at work to find out means for their gratification. All this Jesus experienced as a temptation to prostitute his miracle working power to minister to selfish ends. He must now choose once for all, whether he would walk the path of life with common humanity, sharing in all the experiences of their common life, with absolutely no appropriation of divine power for personal comfort, or safety, or deliverance, physical, or spiritual, except such as the humblest man might have, or whether he would take his place with the great host of mere wonderworkers, who had proclaimed themselves saviors of men only to end in disastrous mocking and failure. So here he rose to loftiest moral heroism as he said : " Man shall not live by bread alone," and hurled back the temptation promptly and finally. For us the lesson is, that no appeal through any appetite whatever, can justify us in doing anything that will dishonor the highest that is in us, or lead us to compromise our mission, or let us drop to a lower plane of life and service than that to which God has called us in our best and highest moments.

THERE are those who say Satan could not have given these things even if Jesus had sold himself into his power to gain them. I think he could. History is too full of instances, great and small, in which men have taken Satan at his word when he came to them with this promise and these terms. From Roman Emperors who bought and butchered their way to their thrones; down through petty kings and kinglets, who like Goethe's Faust sold themselves to Satan on his own terms; on down to politicians, who have climbed to power in our own day by selling every high and sacred thing in their own characters and also in their nation's interests; on down to men who have risen from poverty to wealth by oppression and wrong and wickedness of every sort, all these have only proved by their own experience that Satan can fulfill this promise to those who accept his terms.

Every business man who under great stress is tempted to adopt questionable means to extricate himself from embarrassment: every promoter of a great cause who is tempted to resort to questionable methods to advance it: every man tempted to take short cut by unwarranted means to success,

stands where Jesus stood in this crucial moment, and needs to utter with like decision the lofty declaration : "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."



Matthew 4:6

BAFFLED, but not yet beaten, Satan returns to the attack, utilizing with his usual craft the very tactics by which Jesus had warded off his previous attacks.

Very well, your trust in your Father is so strong let us put it to the test, said the Tempter : "Cast thyself down from this lofty pinnacle of the Temple." Many a soul that could not be reached by the temptation to prostitute holy things to selfish ends, has yielded to some form of temptation to spiritual presumption : to some unwarranted application of divine promises : to wild venture in the name of God, just as fantastic and unreasonable as this appeal to leap from the dizzy heights, expecting God to work a miracle of deliverance.

People need to learn how sacred a thing common sense is, and that sin against it, ranks not far below sin against the Holy

Ghost. From no Sinai on earth does God ever speak to men more surely and clearly than from the calm, lucid levels of enlightened common sense.

Said Harriet Beecher Stowe: "I do not wonder that Christianity has survived the attacks of its enemies, but I do marvel unceasingly that it has survived the follies of its votaries." Follies like leaping from Temple pinnacles have shamed every age of Christian history and will likely continue to do so to the end. But over against all temptations there stands this picture of Jesus calmly rising above the solicitation to this very thing, saying: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."



John 14:6

FOR every man Jesus Christ is the one personality in human history in which every virtue and every excellence is found in concrete form. Clearly enough defined for child or peasant, philosopher or keen-eyed practical business man. Do you mention purity? Jesus is the synonym for it. Do you speak of righteousness? Jesus is the embodiment of it. Do you exhort to truth? Jesus is truth. Do you ask for

unselfishness? Jesus was the incarnation of it. Do you demand courage? Never on battlefield or any other field was calmer, more unswerving, more unostentatious courage manifested than in His whole life. Do you ask for goodness? He was the brightness of it, and the express image of it. Do you require gentleness, meekness, self-control, patience? Never did these gem-like virtues gleam and sparkle upon any character as on His. Do you call for love? His life exhaled it as flowers their fragrance. Wearily and heart sick you may have turned away from one human model after another, as each in turn betrayed some defect, but here you find the one perfect and changeless embodiment of every virtue, grace and excellence. And, too, He proclaims Himself Brother and Helper and Example, who will walk the ways of life with us, and who will not be to us an enthroned, distant, inaccessible and uninterested spectator of our stumbling, groping efforts toward better things.



Hebrews 4:15

I ONE day stood watching a picture grow under an artist's brush. It became necessary at a certain stage to make

an object in the picture look blacker than any dark pigment in the artist's possession could. "How can you do it?" I asked in perplexity. Taking the purest white pigment at hand, the artist deftly touched to intense whiteness an object beside the dark one, and instantly to the eye the blackness of the dark figure appeared to have been deepened many shades. So when God would show to men the "exceeding sinfulness of sin," would have them get some idea of how unutterably black it looked as seen from heaven, He simply sent the pure white life of Jesus into this world, to put itself down beside the blackness of the sin polluted lives of men. Since then, as never before, men have seen the utter and horrible blackness of sin. Because of the clear, steady, quiet exhibition of its opposite in His own life, spirit and teachings, even more than by the occasional burning denunciations of it, the hideousness of sin seems to have been almost a revelation to men, not but what here and there noble souls all along the ages have had some very clear views of its hatefulness. Yet not the purest soul in all the world's history had gained such a vision of its loathsomeness, as millions have had, since Jesus taught men how to look at it.

MILLET'S "Man with the Hoe," shows the human face and form reduced to the very verge of brutehood. Markham's poem upon it, charges the existing social, civil, and industrial conditions, with the responsibility of the degeneracy here illustrated. All these may have some share in producing this effect. But more than all these combined in their potency for evil in this man's life, were his own low choices and practices, and those of his ancestors through many generations.

Heredity and environment, have not a little to do in molding the character. But they work as often and as effectually for good, as for evil, in the life. "Heredity," says Glad-den, "is God working in us," as often and as strongly as "Evil working in us." Environment is as often "God working round about us," as it is "Evil crowding upon us." We can as surely work with the good for high ends, as with the evil for low ends.

If any one fact has been demonstrated beyond a peradventure in human affairs, it is that the "Stars in their courses fight" for the man whose face is set like a flint toward clean, high, worthy manhood.

The choices the man makes, and the per-

sistency with which he holds to good and noble things, will determine what he is. In one age men, "make guilty of their disasters the sun, moon and stars; as if they were villains on necessity: fools by heavenly compulsion: knaves, thieves and treachers by spherical predominance: drunkards, liars and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence: and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on." So wrote Shakespeare of the effort of men to shift the responsibility of their conduct from themselves. Heredity, environment, and even hypnotic influence, are the modern pseudo scientific substitutes for the ancient scapegoats of stars, and all the mummeries of astrology. Yet it is forever true that: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life." The man's own will counts for much in the struggle.



James 1:12

I ONCE listened to Remenyi, the great Hungarian violinist, in an Iowa town. At one of the most intensely interesting parts of one number, the locomotive of an

incoming freight train began a long, shrill whistle, that seemed interminable to the auditors. All sounds from the violin were effectually drowned. But we noticed the eyes of the violinist twinkling significantly, as he held the bow on the string. As the whistle entered on a descending scale of harrowingly discordant notes, he followed it with most skillfully imitated sounds. The surprised and delighted audience broke out into cheers, and he resumed his part with new spirit, having not only wrested victory from defeat, but gathered a new inspiration by the very mastery over what had threatened to be a disaster.

That lesson remained with his hearers even a more valuable possession than the effect and memory of his exquisite music.



1 Corinthians 13:13

LOVE is the heart of all true service toward God or toward man. It is the root of all life that is fruitful of good. It creates a new spirit in, and a new atmosphere around him, who possesses it, or rather is possessed by it. It makes the im-

possible possible. It wakens and thrills with activity, powers hitherto dormant. It girds with a sustaining power, as nothing else can. Look about you in the commonest walks of life, and see how as with a magician's power it transforms the humblest kinds of service into something very like the ministry of angels. Lives that judged by outward seeming appear rude, hard, and coarse, have, when touched by love, taken on a beauty richer than any culture could impart, nobler than any rank could give. Those lives have eagerly, patiently, persistently rendered services to the object of their love, no money could have hired them to give, no authority compelled them to do, no cold, hard logic of duty could have held them to the performance of. Strong, sure, and enduring as the might of gravitation that holds the planets to the sun, is the power of love to hold a soul to its object.

Love, love, love, this holiest angel of human life makes the sunshine, the sweetness, the beauty, the music, the joy, the glory, and the fragrance of the life that now is, and is the very soul of all that allures in the life to come.

I ONCE came upon a squalid little village in India located near the summit of a water shed. The scanty support of the people depended upon the amount of rain which might come to fill the pools from which they irrigated their fields. I asked the name of the village, and was surprised to learn that it was Asman-pore—Heaven's city. "Why do you call it so?" I asked. They replied: "Sahib, for the reason that if Heaven sends plenty of rain, we fare well, if not, we suffer. Sahib, we hang on Heaven here."

After all our complacent boasting and self-sufficiency, do not we all in reality hang as absolutely on Heaven, as did the people of that village? As a matter of fact, the Nebuchadnezzars in their arrogant self-laudation, are in the end, as dependent as the most self-distrusting child on earth.



1 John 3 : 8

TO sit idly and indifferently by, while great, audacious, and dominant evils go striding on, is to invite moral and spiritual paralysis. It is not an adequate excuse

to say: "The evils are so great, and so strongly allied with powerful interests, that they cannot be overthrown." If we would be worthy followers of Him, "who was manifest that He might destroy the works of Satan," we must at least protest, and maintain an habitual attitude of antagonism, toward whatever ought to be put down, whether there is any seeming probability of successful resistance or not. The mission of the Kingdom of God on earth, is to accomplish the impossible, or what worldly minds oracularly call impossible.

Moral and spiritual giants never appear, except when tremendous battle is being waged to overthrow impregnable evils. Men called "mad," "fanatics," "lunatics," from Paul to Luther, from John Knox to General Booth, from William Lloyd Garrison to John G. Woolley, have been the men who have wrought the world's deliverance. They kept right on trying to accomplish the impossible until they did it, and they themselves took on the proportions of moral and spiritual gianthood as they battled.

IN an investigation of the horrible Whitechapel, London, murders, a reporter said to a denizen of that quarter: "How was it possible for such outrages to be repeatedly committed here, and no one heard the outcries?" "O," replied the man grimly, "It is every one for himself down here. A scream, or a cry for help, or even the shout of 'murder,' attracts no attention. Nobody cares to try to help any one else. If one cries, we let him cry, if he shrieks, we let him shriek,—it is no concern of ours."

Can you imagine anything on earth more like hell than that? Yet it is only the logical and inevitable result of the absence of the helpful spirit, the brotherly interest in others, the brotherly kindness that Jesus everywhere enjoins. Put streets of gold beneath the feet of such a community, and walls of jasper around them, harps in their hands, and angel's pinions on them, and they would still be as far from heaven, as imagination could picture. For them, as for every community, nothing but the reception of the spirit of love, can change their hell to heaven.

THE universe was framed for righteousness. This sublime truth sounds as the master note through all the jangling discords of that great oratorio called human history.

Every tragedy, whether enacted by individuals or by nations, has led solemnly, and majestically, up to the illustration of this great truth.

Every comedy, whether persons were the ludicrous actors, or whether nations played the clown, with a pitiful absurdity that made devils laugh, and angels weep, has had, as its outcome, a new and startling exhibition of this one eternal truth that faces all men everywhere in their sorrows, and in their joys, in their success or defeat, in their honesty or their iniquity.

The human heart clings to the belief that ultimately, somehow, somewhere, righteousness will triumph, and no combination of seemingly contradictory facts, no marshalling of apparently unanswerable arguments, can for long keep the normal mind from believing it.

THAT was a brave and noble act of Hezekiah, when he found the "Brazen Serpent" had come to be a mere fetich to the people. Taking it and holding it up before the multitude, he said: "It is 'Nehushtan' " (only a piece of brass), then broke it into fragments. No doubt many devout souls were shocked, some even wounded grievously, as the long and sacredly preserved relic was thus rudely destroyed. But Hezekiah was right. And so in all ages, the man who has the clear eye to see when a cherished object has by its very antiquity, and by the memory of its once great usefulness, come to be practically an idol to the masses, shutting them out from that which is really essential to their highest well-being, is also right in calling it "Nehushtan," and smiting it to pieces.

Before giving too hearty assent to this, stop and remember, that a fearlessly logical application of this principle, may mean some hard dealing with our old conceptions of some books of the Bible, as to date, authorship and environment of composition, may mean sad work with some articles of our creed: may start an earthquake under some of our favorite dogmas. To-day, as of old, people turn from their task of garnishing

the sepulchers of the prophets their fathers slew, to stone the prophets of their own generation.



2 Kings 18:4

MUCH needless fear is entertained about the results of higher criticism on the Bible. This is caused, in part, by the reckless efforts of those who are glad to seize upon anything by which they can gain cheap notoriety, and by still others, who think they find in these results, that which confirms their disbelief in the Bible, and then give out statements oracularly, that the divine authority of the book is gone.

But honest and intelligent students of the movement know, that higher criticism that is reverent, seeks only to gain clear, full and accurate knowledge of the actual facts concerning the books of the Bible, the dates, authorship, environments under which produced, the integrity of the texts, and, in short, to learn the real truth about those books, so far as it is possible to arrive at it, regardless of all preconceived notions. As a matter of fact, the Bible has never been more deeply and firmly rooted in the confidence of Christian scholarship as God's message to men, than it is to-day. When

the popular mind comes to understand the real facts in the case, and learns how profoundly true the deepest and widest scholarship has found the divine authority of the Bible to be, there will be revivals of religion compared with which the greatest of past history will seem small.



2 Kings 18:4

A CREED is only a formulated statement of beliefs. Creeds are indispensable to churches in their practical work. People must know what a church stands for, if they intelligently co-operate with it. But the crucial test of a creed must be, the power of its stated doctrines to help men and women to righteousness of character and conduct. I have a creed which has been helpful to me, which I know has been helpful to many, and which I believe may be to still others. But bring to me another creed, I care not how new or how old, how long or how short, how simple or how elaborate, and demonstrate to me that it can do more toward bringing men and women to righteousness of character and conduct, than the one I hold, I will on the instant give up mine, and accept that with all my heart.

WE look out over a planted field, and know that there is a huge laboratory, in which a great network of laws are vigorously, patiently, persistently operating, all working together with precision and assured success to the definite end of bringing, first to "blade, then to ear, and then to full corn in the ear," the seed that has been sown. Man's part in ploughing, planting, and cultivating, is no more a result of intelligence and design, than God's framing and sustaining in activity the laws and forces that supplement man's work in producing the crop.

We look at our own lives, and in the light of Bible teaching say: "That field and its maturing harvest, is no more under 'reign of law,' than are our lives, and the moral and spiritual germs sown in them."

Two of the most self-evident yet most persistently ignored lessons of human life lie wrapt up in this great fact mentioned in the text, viz: warning to the sowers of evil seed, and hope inspiring assurance to those who seek to sow good seed. The law of growth and reproduction after its kind, is just as surely bound up in every moral, as in every physical germ, and it operates with equal certainty both for good and for evil. In nothing does human folly proclaim itself more shamefully than in its reckless seed sowing.

EVERY spring in England, bird fanciers take their captive larks in their cages, out into the meadows in the early morning, and set them down where they can hear their fellow larks in freedom sing. As their fellows, glad in their liberty, ring out their melodious, flexible, thrilling notes, the captives in the cages listen a while, then strike the responsive note, join with their fellows above them in the glad morning song with wild self-abandonment, and their own song is then "set" for the year. Without this process they invariably degenerate as songsters, until they lose their song entirely.

So we spiritual captives in our earthly prison houses, need to catch at intervals the songs that come floating down to us from kindred but freer spirits high above us, and as we listen we find our spiritual song "set" anew to higher, sweeter, purer notes, as we turn back again to the routine duties and experiences of daily life. Here is the philosophy of "communion of saints," and herein lies in no small part the "open reward of those who enter into their closets, and pray to 'the Father who seeth in secret.' "

THE clock in the tower of Westminster Abbey, just before striking the hour, rings out on its chime of bells, the music to the old couplet which runs thus :

All through this hour, be Thou my Guide,
For by Thy power, no foot shall slide.

All through the whirling tumult of the busy London day, and on through the mysterious watches of the night, every hour, that prayer rings sweetly out to strengthen the weak, encourage the despondent, and to be to all who hear it like the voice of a sleepless guardian angel, suggesting a heavenly vision of watch-care and loving solicitude, which no soul can be disobedient to without sad and irreparable loss.

If our ears were rightly attuned to spiritual verities, we all could hear through the din, and bustle, and stress, of our daily lives, heavenly voices proclaiming the sleepless vigilance of divine love and power over us, in all the labors, duties, and experiences that come to us.



James 4 : 7

WITHOUT reference to any theological ideas, new or old, we may say that heaven is the consummation of a life of obedience to God's laws, and hell is the

consummation of a life of disobedience to them, independently of all geography, temporal or eternal, physical or spiritual.

A morally weak man assailed by temptation, protests, but drifts with the current, his protests steadily growing weaker, until they cease entirely, and he goes down under the power of the flood.

A morally strong man calmly, but squarely, faces the temptation, promptly and resolutely puts it aside, and then at once and uncompromisingly begins to adjust himself and his affairs to the one fact that that is a closed question, and under no circumstances to be opened for discussion again. Morally open questions are ever the pitfalls that entrap men.



Colossians 3 : 23

THERE is a lesson for us in the fact, that God strews flowers of most exquisite beauty in profusion over fields rarely visited by any being who can appreciate them, over mountain sides almost inaccessible, and through valleys deeply hidden.

It is as though He were thus teaching

the sacredness of all life and experience, whether to ordinary commercial rules of judgment it seems of immediate practical use or not. Every life however placed, ought to produce whatever may be possible for it to bring forth, of beauty or fragrance or usefulness, doing it as unto God and not to men.

History is only the record of God's work "writ large," years are the syllables in this handwriting: decades are the words: centuries the sentences: milleniums the paragraphs. The sum of the whole story when spelled out and interpreted is: "God is a consuming fire toward all sin, but God is love toward all his children yesterday, to-day and forever."

Nothing the telescope can bring into view from distant stellar spaces is too large, nothing the microscope can reveal is too small, to have its appointed place and work in God's vast plans. And, too, that place can be filled in the same way by nothing else. Yet if a given object fails to do its appointed work, another can be easily substituted, and God's plans go on. But it is not just the same plan as would have been if that thing had obediently played its part, but whether

a better or worse plan in its execution, that thing which failed to do its assigned part, has forever lost its glory and honor and the highest significance of its being. There is something awe inspiring in the way God silently but decisively and finally sets aside an unwilling instrument and substitutes one more subservient to His purpose.



Exodus 2 : 9

MANY of the noblest, purest, strongest souls this world has known, have let us into the secret of their greatness, by telling us what their mothers were. We learn that it was the mother in most cases who led them into the very holy of holies of clean, strong, noble manhood. It was from the devout, consistent and consecrated mother's life their young souls caught the reflection of the "Shekinah" that was the refining and character-molding power in all their lives.

The mission of motherhood is the highest and holiest beneath the stars. Whenever a child is born, God solemnly says to the mother: "Take this child and nurse it for

me, and I will give thee thy wages." Has any treasury of earth ever yielded such compensation as the true mother receives for the care she bestows upon her children? On the other hand, has any promised reward ever commanded such utterly self-forgetting, self-consuming sacrifice as that which mothers render to their children with never a thought of recompense? Mother-love is one of the sweetest mysteries of our human life. It puts at the very fountain head of all the streams of life, a holy influence that purifies, sweetens and hallows them. No life is utterly hopeless of redemption, however low it may fall, or however wide it wanders from right ways, if it has known the pure, strong and gentle love of a noble mother, in its childhood. Whether men believe in other ministering angels or not, all right-minded men believe that the memory of a mother's love is an abiding guardian angel in the life of every one whose childhood was hallowed by it.



Exodus 2 : 9

MOST of the faults, foibles and mistakes of the so-called "new woman," will be found after a while, to have belonged only to the period of transition from the

old to the new conditions of womanhood. Fields once inaccessible to her are now open. Many individuals have acted unwisely, and, after an unwomanly fashion, many still are doing so, and doubtless many will continue to do so. But the great body of womankind always have been, still are and always will be, modest, gentle and loving and lovely, carrying the atmosphere of purity with them wherever they go, silently rebuking the rudeness, coarseness and impurity of the world about them by what they are and the feelings they inspire. Blessed is the man whose life has known the hallowed influence of mother, sister, wife and daughter, all uniting to draw him up to high and holy things. No convoy of angels could mean more of helpfulness, security and blessedness.



Exodus 2:9

A GENERATION ago infidel women were rarely met. To-day we find them multiplying in many places. If infidel mothers, along with infidel fathers, become the rule in the homes of our land, whence shall come the moral and religious training of the nation's children, that is so necessary to the formation of thoroughly

sound moral character, which in its turn, is the foundation of civil, social, industrial and commercial order ?

An hour's instruction in the Sunday School once a week, given by others, will accomplish but little, for the moral training of the children in the face of Godless and infidel home-life. To our thought the most ominous sign of the times is the spreading unbelief among women. But we believe it is only a momentary eddy in the current of events. Our faith is unwavering in the inherent religiousness of woman's nature, and we cannot doubt that in some way the skeptical tendency will be stayed, before it shall have attained serious proportions, and the womanhood of christendom will continue to press, as she has done through the ages, with loving heart, pure desires and holy aspirations, nearest the Master in the world's onward and upward march.

Goethe says : " It is the eternal womanly that leads us on." This is true, because all healthy, normal, womanly instincts are loyal to all those virtues and excellences that constitute the very essence of the religious life. Like an eternal and sacred order of Vestal Virgins, womanhood will keep alive the fires of religious life on the world's great altars everywhere.

STOP before one of our city fruit stands, and look at the splendid fruits of all sorts exhibited. Of them all, not one came to its perfection by accident. Behind each specimen was a long history of planning, and care, and culture. More than that, the tree or the vine that produced these fruits for this season, will need careful and constant attention in order that they may produce equally good fruit next year. Somebody will have to toil, and plan, and watch unceasingly, to produce such results. All this in addition to what God will do in rain, and sunshine, and giving qualities of soil and vital forces. To produce such fruits, somebody will have to learn God's established laws concerning the growth of them, and then faithfully co-operate with Him to that end.

So in spiritual matters. The "fruits of the spirit," do not come by accident, or as a result of idle longing, but only by working together with God for their production in our lives. God will work with us, and through us, but never in spite of us, to produce these fruits within us.

I SPENT a night in the home of a friend where a loose lightning rod, just outside the window, by its harsh grating, produced a most dolorous series of depressing sounds all night, as the wind swayed it. My dreams were so full of horrible suggestions produced by its wailing sobbing and at times fiercely violent notes, that when morning came I felt as if I had spent the night in a chamber of horrors. On a second visit, I occupied the same room. The rod had been fastened, and made no more noise, and as the breeze swept into the room, the soft, sweet notes of an æolian harp filled the room.

That night my dreams were keyed responsively to the gentle music that filled the room, and I awoke in the morning refreshed by a delightful night's sleep.

Many of us need to readjust things that make the whole influence of our lives a harsh, discordant, depressing force in the social world where we move, and instead, get placed within us the æolian harp of a love-tuned spirit.

THE keyword of the Old Testament is righteousness. The keyword of the New Testament is love. The combined injunction of the two is: "Let there be absolute righteousness of character and conduct, guided, controlled, impelled by love." So great is the change wrought in any life in which there is complete obedience to this injunction, that no other term can be used to describe it but "a new creation."

It is sometimes said of a man: "He is a good man I suppose—but keep your eyes open when you deal with him." And you also sometimes hear it said of a woman: "She is very religious I know—but she is not pleasant to live with."

Not until our religion has made us irreproachably upright in business, and has made us pleasant to live with, has it wrought its full mission in our lives. Not the poetry, nor the sentiment, nor the theory, nor the ecstasy of religion, can be accepted before God as the legitimate fruit in this life. Absolutely nothing will meet the requirement, but a righteous life dominated by love, that is, "a new creation."

JESUS set up a new standard for manhood in His Sermon on the Mount. It calls for a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. It in fact takes the best types produced by every great civilization, and adds new qualities, imparts new spirit and richer tone to all the elements of character in them, and setting forth the vastly improved product, points to it and says: "There, that is what I mean you to be." Then to give the concrete example, Jesus himself embodies all that perfect combination of ideal elements of manhood, and lives the faultless life among men in all the ordinary experiences of human conditions, brother to us all.

Yet further encouragement is given to all our common humanity in its struggle toward better things, by a Greek Aristides reappearing among us christianized to a still higher level, and known to us as Washington: a Roman Cato modernized into a Lincoln: a Brutus clarified and spiritualized into a Gladstone. Noble types of splendid manhood multiply, and the general moral average of humanity steadily rises. No magnet has ever manifested the drawing power exerted by the uplifted Christ. Onward, upward and ever yet more mightily it draws the whole

race. Christian nations have men by the thousand to-day, who can compare with the highest and noblest specimens that in ancient times stood alone, or in very small groups, in their respective nations, conspicuous for their virtues. The distinguishing glory of Christianity is, that its mission is not to save the exceptional individual, but the common mass of humanity. Christ was the revealer of human worth wholly apart from all distinctions of wealth, rank, sex, or intelligence. The intrinsic worth of the individual soul was never understood until he disclosed it.



Mark 14 : 38



AID Matthew Arnold :

Tasks in hours of insight will'd
Can be in hours of gloom fulfill'd.

Who has not had his hours of insight, lofty moments, when hopes were high, when all the powers seemed girded for noble action, and through the soul were sounding bugle calls to all high things. Then any task, however great, seemed easy.

But these thrilling hours have swept by, and in their wake have come the hours of

gloom, when all powers seem ungirded, all hopes prostrate, and all music is in minor key, while clouds and darkness are all about us. Then comes the supreme test of our loyalty to high things. Then comes out the reserve strength, born of intimate union with divine things. It is the mission of prayer, by consciously linking us with divine forces and influences, to make possible the steady, straightforward, fulfillment of those great visions, that made the hours of insight glorious.



Psalm 10 . 9

THE old Puritan character had its faults, many and great. It is easy for the elegant, but invertebrate moral critics of this cultured generation, to ridicule the rugged and sometimes narrow qualities of those "Old Ironsides." But sometimes as we listen, we cannot help feeling that it is wonderfully like a generation of tadpoles reviling a race of elephants. Those stern, but incorruptible old heroes, could look any sort of temptation in the eye, and look it out of countenance, whether it came in the guise

of royal authority and power, ablaze with persecuting wrath, or came with all the soft and wily blandishments of a Delilah. They could watch, with all the calm, steady resoluteness of a lonely sentinel at night on the outmost picket line in an enemy's country. They could fight at any moment of the day or night. "Say your prayers and keep your powder dry," was one of their favorite mottoes. They could pray, and pray to the purpose. The first command when in battle array was, "Kneel." Then the whole battle line grasping the musket with one hand, dropped on its knees for a short, but mighty prayer, then rose and swept resistlessly to victory. The cultured, morally, easy-going generation of to-day, may sneer at them if it will, but it can never repay the debt it owes them, for only such "God-intoxicated" men, could have wrenched from what was then almost omnipotent tyranny, the liberties that make life worth the living in our day.

These were the men who, driven from the land of their birth because of their loyalty to duty as they saw it, crossed the ocean with their wives and little ones, to find a home in a new wild country, where whatever hardships must be endured, the blessed boon of liberty would be theirs.

So they landed on the "bleak and barren

coast," with courage high as the heaven that bent above them: with purpose, firm as the granite of the hills that rose before them: love of liberty, broad as the continent that stretched before them: and faith in God, as deep as the ocean that rolled behind them, and took possession of this new world, and consecrated its virgin soil through all its length and breadth to "The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man," as no land in human history had ever been. He who rails at Puritanism lifts his puny voice against one of the mightiest forces for good in this world's history.



Luke 10:27

SO near is God to man, that he who strikes best for God strikes best for man, and he who strikes best for man strikes best for God. Service of God with all the heart, soul, might, mind and strength, necessitates the loving of one's neighbor as one's self. "Who is my neighbor?" we ask, and then proceed to drag out our surveyor's chain, and measure off the distance in miles and furlongs, to deter-

mine. Or we get out national pedigree records, and study up the ties of blood relationships, with all their conventionally recognized obligations.

Jesus swept all that aside, with his doctrines of The Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of man, and made the word "neighbor" forever mean, any one in all the wide world whose necessities we can minister to, whose sorrows can be assuaged by our sympathy, whose burdens can be lightened by our kindness and love.



Joshua 24:15

THE scriptural idea is that the father shall be in a very high sense, priest in his household. The modern idea of a man being "brother-in-law to the church," and so turning over all religious duties to the wife, has no warrant anywhere in the Bible. Fathers who seek to shift the responsibility of care for the religious training of the children over to the mother, will find when God comes to square accounts with them, that they never really got rid of the burden. God put it upon their shoulders, and kept it there to the end, in spite of their attempts at self-delusion, and their

repeated assertion that they had passed it over to the mothers, or the Sunday School, or the Church. Wife, and Sunday School, and Church, are only helpers to supplement, not institutions to supplant, the father's efforts. However faithfully all these may work together, lacking the father's co-operation they often fail, because the boys are more powerfully influenced by the father's example, in many instances, than by any other force that operates on their lives. There are fathers in this city, who lay the flattering unction to their souls that they are most excellent fathers, who give no more thought to the intellectual and moral development of their children, than they do to the education intellectually and morally of the remotest Hottentot tribe of South Africa.

My friend, it is not so much what you put around your child, as what you put into him, that will determine his future.



Joshua 24:15

THE idea of the family taught by Jesus is, that there shall be joint headship. "They twain shall be one." Happy the home in which as Tennyson puts it, the

relation of husband and wife is that, "of perfect music set unto noble words," making the home life one prolonged anthem of sweet harmonies." Then, let the dwelling place be palace or hut, or any degree of refinement between these extremes, it is a paradise on earth. Nothing brings "the statelier Eden back to men" as such homes, in which strong, clean, noble manhood and pure, gentle, loving womanhood, joined together—fatherhood and motherhood. If religion can claim any one field as above all others peculiarly its own, it is here. When little ones come like angels to bless the home, then comes the most imperative demand that religion ever makes, to create and maintain around the gently unfolding life as nearly as possible the atmosphere and molding forces of heavenly influences. Then, if ever, right minded fatherhood and motherhood say reverently, and resolutely: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."



Mark 11:22

I SAT one day in a bazaar in Lucknow, India, watching a vast crowd of Hindoos beating tom-toms, wailing, praying, blowing trumpets and calling upon all the

host of Hindoo gods to save the sun from threatened destruction as it seemed to them. To me it was only an eclipse of the sun that was taking place. But to the hundred thousand terrified Hindoos the sun was in imminent danger of being swallowed by an enormous dragon, and the consequences to the world would be horrible to contemplate. Their terror was real. But in a few hours the shadow passed, and the sun shone forth with wonted strength. We pride ourselves on our superior knowledge, and smile at the groundless panic of the ignorant Hindoos. Yet have we not at times been almost as badly terrified at the supposed coming calamities, which a little more spiritual knowledge and faith, would have shown us to be as harmless as was the eclipse to the Hindoos? With our larger knowledge we study the eclipse, and find it illustrating in sublime ways the power of our Father. So a larger faith, would enable us to see in many of the experiences of life that now fill us with dread or terror, new evidences of His mighty power, that is pledged to protect and help and guide us.

ONE writer of war history has said that the chief difference between General Grant and the other generals, was the fact, that when they were defeated, they acknowledged it, and proceeded in strict accord with the established rules and traditions of war under such circumstances, to call off their troops and adjust their affairs to the defeat as such. But General Grant when defeated, as, for instance, at the end of the first day's battle at Shiloh, sturdily refused to recognize the fact, and pushed right on as if victorious, until in the end he was victorious.

If you get at the secret history of most of the glorious victories on every battlefield of life, physical, mental and moral, you will find they were won by just such tactics. The surest victors in most battles are those who never plan for defeat, never acknowledge defeat, never stop with defeat, but go right on through defeat to victory. They may come into the station like Bret Harte's stage of the Sierras, on only one wheel—but they come in. They may bring their ship into port with only one deck above water—but they come in. But this virtue does not come by chance, nor by any hot-

house method of nurture. It must grow and harden its fibre as the oak, out on the mountain side, where storms and alternate severities of summer and winter do their work.



Romans 5:3

POWER to endure is the highest test of strength. When men are looking for anything on which to rely for the accomplishment of great enterprises, they always demand what we commonly call the staying quality. Men want it in their horses: they require it in their subordinates: they demand it in the men they vote for: they feel the need of it everywhere.

The power to make a brilliant dash on a special occasion has its value, but to do the world's necessary humdrum routine work, it will count for little if not supplemented by the power to patiently, doggedly, and even obstinately hold on. Patient endurance has won more victories in every department of life than any other quality. "Time and I against any other two," was the favorite saying of a great Frenchman. Patience is "the staying quality," among

christian virtues. Patience that is rooted in God, means steadiness in a christian purpose and effort and service. Indeed, Lange translates the word rendered "patience" in our text as "constancy," others have translated it by the more intense phrase, "patient endurance." Paul certainly meant to convey the idea of holy, immovable, unwearing persistency—consecrated staying quality.



Romans 5:3

TO Paul's mind no christian grace or excellence was ever to be regarded as an end in itself. Each when gained was to be only a stepping stone to something yet higher. No money maker ever watched his capital accumulating, every added dollar becoming a new center of growth, until the treasures increased with geometrical ratio, as Paul watched the development of christian graces in those disciples over whom he felt himself to be the guide and shepherd. So he writes to them (Rev. Ver.): "Let us rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh patience: and patience probation: and pro-

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bation hope: and hope putteth not to shame."

Noble teacher and example was this mighty man of God. Like an eagle beating up against the fury of a storm, he rises only the higher as the strength of the storm increases, and not only moves on in triumph himself, but calls out to others who are battling against the same adverse winds, words of encouragement, that put new hope and strength into their souls.

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